

## FILMMAKER: KHASHEM GYAL

*Please introduce yourself.*

My name is Khashem Gyal. I was born in Chu ma, a small farming community in Reb gong, in the northeastern part of the Tibetan Plateau, where we herd yaks, sheep, and cows, and also cultivate wheat, barley, and potatoes. I graduated from Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) University for Nationalities in 2013 with a BA in Tibetan Language and Literature. While a student there, I came to realize that photography and film have the power of sculpting time and preserving certain times in our lives.



My initial inspiration was to preserve Tibetan culture and promote it through photography and film. I thus started a journey of self-study in an environment where there was limited understanding of film, and an even more limited number of mentors.

About a year later, I established *Amilolo Films*, the first filmmaking group at the university, in the hope of educating and encouraging a new generation of Tibetan filmmakers. In 2013, the year of my graduation, I finished a two-year long production, a feature-length documentary *Valley of the Heroes* with my team.

Never having attended kindergarten, I spent most of my childhood on sacred mountains, near clean rivers, and with various forest birds. This created an intimate relationship between the environment and myself. I eventually realized that I had learned so



<sup>1</sup> Interview: Filmmaker: Khashem gyal. 2017. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 44:384-387.

many things in nature's embrace that I could never have learned from books and in school. In addition, some of the most unforgettable memories from my childhood are the vivid characters and narratives presented in folktales, passed from generation to generation, and that I heard from my parents and brothers after dinner. Without television, films, and even radios, stories were one of the few forms of entertainment that I enjoyed a lot. It gave me the imagination to create my own world each night. Those were like hundreds of "invisible" films in my childhood that planted the seed of storytelling in my life.

### *What films have you made?*

I have made several films in the past few years, e.g., a short documentary *Molam* (2010), a short fiction film, *After a Rain* (2011); a feature-length documentary *Valley of the Heroes* (2013); and *Nomad* (2015). I also made such promotional videos as *2013 Machik SEP* (2013), *2014 Machik SEP* (2014), and *Sorig Tour* (2015).



Besides making films, I frequently take photographs. I have been working on a photography project - "Framed City" - over the past three years. It documents ordinary people's lives in cities in the context of China's dramatic social change in recent years. Each form of art - fiction, documentaries, and photography - has its own characteristics that represent society, and reflect myself on some level.

### *What films are you planning?*

I'm working on two film projects. One is about a family of twelve from Xinjiang who live in Xi'an City in Shaanxi Province. I want to document their life and challenges between their home, a rural village

in Xinjiang, and the modern, metropolitan Xi'an. After the past few years of working on Tibet-themed films, I want to do something else to challenge myself. Challenges are the most precious parts of life and I have been thinking about how to transcend my identity to approach another human being while minimizing intervention from my identity, religion, and values.

The second film is about the advance and challenges Traditional Tibetan Medicine (TTM) is facing in the West and how to maintain TTM's integrity in Tibet in the context of globalization and climate change.

*What explains your interest in film?*

My interest in and desire to make films have been contoured by my life's journey. Film and photography are touch-stones, purifying my heart and inner world. They give me a way to interact and understand life. I wouldn't do so if a "camera" had not come into my life. A "camera" gives me a platform to engage with others and to be a good listener by really listening to stories from someone else's heart. The people in my works who are the soul of every single photograph and video clip teach me about the beauty of life and the similarities we share as human beings. That is what gives me the power to keep moving forward on this painstaking yet enjoyable journey. I hope that through the exploration of Tibetan stories, audiences beyond the territory of Tibet can feel a resonance, and that these stories can transcend different boundaries to explore an understanding of life through different lenses.

*Where can we find your films?*

- Most of the promotional videos are on Youtube and Vimeo, but some are not online yet. I hope to upload them soon.

*Nomad* will premiere in Tokyo in February 2017 and is not currently online.

- A trailer for *Valley of the Heroes* is available at <https://goo.gl/ehFE1K> and for purchase at <https://goo.gl/VK4Prm>. A discussion guide to complement *Valley of the Heroes* with detailed information about the film, discussion questions, activities, and additional resources is available at <https://goo.gl/J2XjPj>.
- *2013 Machik SEP* <https://goo.gl/CH1z3s>.
- *2014 Machik SEP* <https://goo.gl/ZDzbIQ>.
- *Sorig Tour* <https://goo.gl/IFXGM7>

#### NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Amilolo, a ma'i lo lo ཨ་མའི་ལོ་ལོ།

chu ma ལུ་མ།

Khashem Gyal, mkha' byams rgyal མཁའ་ཡུམ་སྐུ་ལ།

Machik, ma gcig མ་གཅིག་།

Molam, smon lam མོ་ན་ལམ།

mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྔོན།

reb gong རེབ་གོང་།

sorig, gso rig གསོ་རིག་།

Xi'an 西安

Xinjiang 新疆